Claims

1.   A method for analyzing a media path in a packet switched network, comprising:

        sending and/or receiving a no-op media payload packet over the media path; and

        requesting or receiving media path quality information associated with the no-op media payload packet.

2.   A method according to claim 1 including formatting the no-op media payload packet as a Real Time Protocol (RTP) payload packet that contains no media content.

3.   A method according to claim 1 generating a media path analysis report from the information generated from the transmitted no-op media payload packets.

4.   A method according to claim 3 wherein the media path analysis report is a Real Time Control Protocol (RTCP) report.

5.   A method according to claim 3 including setting a marker bit in the no-op media payload packet to initiate a receiver to immediately send back the media path analysis report.

6.   A method according to claim 5 including determining whether or not to transmit a media stream over the media path according to when or if the media path analysis report is received after transmitting the no-op media payload packet with the set marker bit.

7.   A method according to claim 3 including generating the media path analysis report without playing out contents of the no-op media payload packet.

8.   A method according to claim 3 including:

        receiving multiple no-op media payload packets; and

        generating the media path analysis report according to transmission information for all of the multiple no-op media payload packets.

9.   A method according to claim 1 including determining whether or not to transmit or play out a media stream over the media path according to the information associated with the transmission of the no-op media payload packet.

10.   A method according to claim 1 including notifying a user of a media call according to the information associated with the transmission of the no-op media payload packet.

11.   A network processing device for analyzing an Internet Protocol (IP) network, comprising:

a processor configured to send or receive one or more packets formatted for carrying a media payload but containing no media payload, the processor further configured to send or receive a media stream according to transmission information associated with the packets.

12.   The network processing device according to claim 11 wherein the processor is configured to format the packets into Real Time Protocol (RTP) packets.

13.   The network processing device according to claim 11 wherein the processor is configured to generate a Real Time Control Protocol (RTCP) report using the transmission information associated with the packets.

14.   The network processing device according to claim 11 including a user interface configured to communicate with a device that initiates an IP network connection for transmitting the media stream.

15.   The network processing device according to claim 11 wherein the processor is configured to conduct a signaling session that notifies a receiver that the packets are going to be used for analyzing the IP network.

16. The network processing device according to claim 15 wherein the processor is configured to generate a marker bit in one of the packets that causes the receiver to send back the transmission information associated with the packets.

17. The network processing device according to claim 11 wherein the processor is configured to send or receive the media stream according to the number of successfully transmitted packets and the jitter statistics for the packets.

18. A method for analyzing a media path in a packet switched network, comprising:

sending multiple Real Time Protocol (RTP) payload packets that contain no media payload;

setting a marker bit in one of the RTP payload packets that causes a receiver to send back a Real Time Control Protocol (RTCP) report that contains media path information for the sent RTP payload packets; and

sending a media stream to the receiver according to the media path information in the RTCP report.

19. A method according to claim 18 including:

receiving multiple RTP payload packets that contain no media payload;

generating an RTCP report that that includes media path information for the received RTP payload packets;

sending the RTCP report when one of the RTP payload packets is received that has a set marker bit; and

establishing a media stream according to the media path information in the RTCP report.

20. A method according to claim 19 including delaying ringing a phone used for receiving the media stream until the RTCP report is received and indicates an acceptable media path for sending the media stream.